



DIALOGUE

EXPERT SPEAK

5 May 2020

“CLIMATE CHANGE & COVID-19: CHALLENGES AND WAYS AHEAD FOR NEPAL”

ABSTRACT

Climate change and Covid19 Pandemic are two major challenges that the world is facing today. The interconnected world didn't take even 3 months to get locked and isolated. The least developed countries, who were dependent on other states, have faced the biggest brunt. In the case of Nepal, despite challenges, there are still some opportunities that could be explored amid crisis. Climate Change Expert Mr. Manjeet Dhakal raises some important points and suggests ways ahead for Nepal in this Expert Speak episode.

EXPERT



Mr. Manjeet Dhakal
Head of LDC Support Team, Climate Analytics

About the Expert :

Mr. Manjeet Dhakal is the Head of LDC Support Team at Climate Analytics and is based in Kathmandu, Nepal. He has worked with Climate Analytics as LDC Senior Climate Policy Analyst since 2013 and has been coordinating the technical and strategic advisory support provided to the Least Developed Country Group (LDC) in the UNFCCC negotiations. He has been participating in the UN Climate Change negotiations since 2009 as a member of the national delegation of Nepal and was a key part of the LDC efforts that led to the Paris Agreement in 2015, taking part in many of the high level processes in that negotiation in support of the LDC Chair.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE TALK

Q.1. Can you briefly explain the vision and scope of Climate Analytics and in particular for Nepal?

A. Climate Analytics is a non-profit climate science and policy institute, with its headquarters in Berlin. We provide scientific, policy and analytical support to assist least developed countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) at the global climate change negotiations.

In Nepal, we are currently supporting the Ministry of Forests and Environment with technical analysis to inform the formulation of Nepal's climate change-related targets for the next 10 years which is formally recorded in a document known as a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement.

Q.2. What is your role as Head of the LDC Team at Climate Analytics?

A. I provide technical inputs and analysis to the LDC Chair and members of the LDC group and also coordinate the support provided by Climate Analytics to the group. As an Advisor to the LDC Group, I have worked with Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Ethiopia in the past and am currently working with Bhutan. I have been providing high-level climate

leadership support for the LDCs' officials and ministers in climate change-related UN processes for many years.

Q.3. According to you, what are some of the biggest climate-driven challenges to countries like Nepal or least developed countries?

A. Nepal, as a least developed country, with resource and capacity constraints has been unable to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change. Its diverse geography makes it vulnerable to various climatic impacts, including extreme temperatures, erratic rainfall, drought, floods, melting snow, and glacier retreat.

The 47 Least Developed Countries (LDCs), including Nepal, have contributed the least to climate change, given their negligible greenhouse gas emissions, but are on the frontlines of its impacts. These countries are also the least able to recover from climate stresses and their economic growth is highly dependent on climate-sensitive sectors.

For example, if a least developed country encounters a severe category of hurricane, then the damage would be relatively higher than that faced by a developed nation under the same circumstances. This happens because LDCs often lack strong infrastructure, early warning systems, and the capacity to move displaced citizens. Additionally, to respond to these impacts, resources allocated to development activities would have to be diverted to respond to such climate impacts, slowing economic progress in the long term.

While climate change will have severe consequences for Nepal, combating it would bring a net positive impact on not only the environment but the economy as well. Energy imports are a substantial burden to LDCs, including Nepal. Some LDCs pay more for fuel imports than they do for education on a per capita basis. A study by Climate Analytics confirms that if all LDCs halved their spending on fuel imports by installing more domestic renewable energy capacity, they could together save over 7 billion USD in fuel import expenditures.

Likewise, currently, Nepal spends twice as much on fossil fuel imports than it spends in total on all other imported products. Therefore, if Nepal could reduce these imports by shifting towards clean energy and electric vehicles, it could save a lot of money. In fact, Nepal could reduce its trade deficit with other countries.

Q.4. Amid the Covid-19 crisis, countries have been facing many challenges. Do you see any opportunity to revive our environment?

A. Definitely, the world and Nepal have been witnessing a reduction in air, noise and water pollution. Globally, climate changing emissions are reducing as well. But this is a very short term and extreme solution. Climate experts have never advocated for such a scenario that shuts down the entire economy altogether. Development must always move ahead, but with cleaner options, which are now more readily available.

There is also a need to reform individual lifestyles. In this case, COVID-19 has shown us useful pathways. For example, before COVID-19, people used to travel excessively, contributing a lot to climate change. However, COVID 19 has not only changed this temporarily but also helped people realize methods to curb unnecessary travels. Awareness about these options would increase further. I see Covid-19, as an eye for the people on how the world should move ahead.

Q.5. Do you think there is a need to take climate change much more seriously and why?

A. If you monitor the global emissions trend, then you can see that countries have not reduced their emissions to levels that are recommended by science. One of the reasons for this is that the already emitted pollution (greenhouse gases) stays in the atmosphere for a number of years. CO₂ can stay in the atmosphere for over 100 years. So, the lockdown for these 2-3 months has shown no basic changes in the carbon emission levels. If emissions continue to rise in a similar fashion, then global temperatures will keep rising, with direct and indirect impacts on the economy, environment, and society. The global average temperature has already risen by 1°C above what it was during pre-industrial times. Nepal's topography, in particular, is even more sensitive to climate change than the global average and has seen an even higher increase. This means that it will face the brunt of climate change impacts.

Q.6. Even though almost the entire world is under lockdown, the temperature seems to be rising globally. What do you think are the reasons behind the rise in emissions and temperature?

A. As greenhouse gases remain in the atmosphere & oceans for centuries, this recent fall in carbon emissions due to the COVID—19 pandemic will not show an immediate impact on the climate. For example, carbon dioxide emissions mainly emitted through the use of fossil fuels stay in the atmosphere for over a hundred years. The global climate scenario we are seeing today is because of human activity in the last 500 years. This means that the impact of COVID-19 on the climate will be seen after a couple of decades.

Q.7. A lot of politicians have often chosen development over climate. The case with Nepal is similar. What would be your suggestion to such politician regarding their preferences?

A. The formula for the development has changed now from what used to happen even 50-60 years before. For example, now we do not use heavy watt light bulbs in our households anymore, and there are no steam or coal engine driven trains. Energy sources have also changed. Even though coal still remains the most used form of energy today, we see a gradual shift from coal and other fossil fuels to cleaner energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydropower.

As we progress, Nepal's development needs to be oriented in this same direction. For example, we need to work to promote cleaner sources of energy in Nepal and promote electric vehicles as well. However, expensive projects such as the 75km long petroleum pipeline from (Bihar) India to (Birgunj) Nepal puts us at a disadvantage. In a world that is moving towards cleaner energies, we should not be investing in infrastructure that promotes fossil fuels.

Q.8. What could be the way ahead for the world and Nepal in particular?

A. As mentioned earlier, if Nepal could reduce imports of fossil fuels, then it could reverse its trade deficit while protecting the environment. The same goes for many other least developed and vulnerable countries. Likewise, countries also have to prepare themselves to respond to climate change impacts.

About the Interviewer:



Ms. Anjali Gupta is a Research Intern in Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs, located at Kathmandu, Nepal. She has done her Masters in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Currently living in Kathmandu, Nepal. Her core areas of interests are Nepal, India and China's Foreign Policy and Diplomatic Affairs.

About Expert Speak:



Expert Speak is an initiative by Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs (AIDIA), Kathmandu. It is one of the ways we are conducting Dialogue between the curious and the expert. These experts are from different fields with different experiences. Similar is the case with the interviewers. Under the project, Expert Speak, we are undertaking a series of interviews, not just in Nepal but from experts worldwide. The project intends to dwell on the key challenges to Nepal's Foreign and Economic Policies. Also, the project intends to understand Nepal's geopolitical challenges opportunities.